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Empowering Ghanaian Polytechnic Students through Entrepreneurship and Competency Based Education: A Case Study of Takoradi Polytechnic

Matthew Kweku Gyan (MBA) Emmanuel Yaw Attah (MA) Michael Asare –Appiah (LLM)
Takoradi Polytechnic, P. O.Box 256,Takoradi, Ghana

Abstract
The youth cannot be ignored in view of the vital roles they play in the socio- economic development of nations around the globe. Entrepreneurship education has been identified as one of the most innovative ways of arresting graduate unemployment around the globe. Youth unemployment has been on the increase in recent times partly due to traditional courses the youth pursue in most tertiary institutions in Ghana which have less linkage to the world of work. Youth unemployment policy features prominently on the national agenda of most developing countries, including Ghana. Consequently, many graduates rely on the government to provide them jobs after school.It is against this backdrop that entrepreneurship education has been introduced in most tertiary institutions in Ghana to equip students with the much needed innovations and entrepreneurial skills to set up businesses as a way of relieving the government from the provision of jobs to the throng of unemployed graduates. This paper evaluates the entrepreneurship education in the Polytechnics in Ghana and how it is structured to meet the aspiration of the students. The paper also investigates students' attitude towards the study of entrepreneurship. It also highlights students' capacities to establish their own businesses after graduation and how they could raise funds and promote stronger relationships with the business community. It is hoped that this would go a long way to unearthing challenges students encounter in the study of entrepreneurship as a course.
Keywords: entrepreneurship education; economic empowerment; competencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The youth in nation building cannot be ignored in view of the vital roles they play in the socio- economic development of nations around the globe. There is no doubt that Entrepreneurship education has been identified as the most innovative way of arresting graduate unemployment around the globe. Youth unemployment, has been on the increase in recent times partly due to traditional courses (history, anthropology, Spanish etc.) youth pursue in most tertiary institutions in Ghana which have less linkage to the world of work (Forojalla, 1993). It is for this reason that the youth unemployment policy features prominently on the government agenda of most developing countries with no except to Ghana.

Consequently, many graduates rely on the government to provide them jobs after school. According to Gyan and Eshun (2012) entrepreneurship education has no uniform approaches as it is generally outside the traditional discipline boundaries. Apart from the fact that, Entrepreneurship innovations and competency education develop students holistically as it offers them opportunities to study other courses such as Economics, Finance, Marketing, it also promotes technology transfer to the job market through the development of technology –based businesses. It further states that the numerous benefits derived by most universities and tertiary institutions are the driving forces for inculcating entrepreneurship education into their curriculum.

It is against this backdrop that entrepreneurship education has been introduced in most tertiary institutions in Ghana to equip prospective students with the much needed innovations and skills to set up businesses as a way of a relieving the government from the provision of jobs to the throng of unemployed graduates filling our streets each day.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

This research is to examine entrepreneurship education in Ghanaian Polytechnics.

- To investigate the students attitude towards the study of course
- To identify challenges students encounter in setting up their businesses
- To assess entrepreneurship knowledge among polytechnic graduates on the job market
- To suggest strategies of making Entrepreneurship education relevant to the job market.

3. ENTERPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship is an economic and social phenomenon. It is also an academic and teaching subject being run by most tertiary institutions in the world. It becomes particularly obvious when one looks at the fast-increasing number of universities all over the world which propose entrepreneurship programmes and courses. The past 15 years have witnessed tremendous growth in the entrepreneurship education throughout the world. The growth is reflected in the introduction of intercollegiate businesses plans competitions, new entrepreneurship curricula and

program and endowed professionals in entrepreneurship (Charney and Libecap 2000). Entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage students succeeding in their chosen fields of endeavors. What makes entrepreneurship education distinctive is its focus on realization of opportunity?

In presenting a report which was contained in the *Logic Models and Outcomes for Youth Entrepreneurship Programs (2001)*. It was asserted that entrepreneurship education empowers the youth including those living with disabilities to learn organizational skills, including time management, leadership development, and interpersonal skills all of which are transferable skills sought by most employers in the job market.

Generally, educational evaluation helps to determine the effectiveness of an educational programme for students. In other words, evaluations help to foster accountability and determine whether an educational programme "makes a difference," to students (Cronbach, 1982). Evaluation serves to trigger programme innovation, to control and optimize programmes, to support strategic decision-making and policies (Neuberger 1991). Stevenson and Jarrillo, (1990) define entrepreneurship as a 'vital part of prosperity, a driving force behind employment, innovation, growth and competitiveness. It is the process by which individuals on their own or inside organizations pursue opportunities without regard for the resources they currently control'.

Numerous studies show a strong correlation between entrepreneurial competence, especially implicit entrepreneurial knowledge (Staudt et al. 1997) and the success of business set-ups (Garavan & O'Cinneide, 1994; Van Der Sluis et al, 2004). Earlier studies have examined the general impact of entrepreneurship education in terms of employment, wages, and firm profits {e.g. Chrisman, Hynes, and Fraser, (1995); McMullan and Griffin, (1998)}. McMullan and Griffin compared the overall business set-up rate by graduates from the Swinburne entrepreneurship programme to set-ups by graduates from an unnamed MBA programmes in Australia. In their discussion, they clearly recognized the difficulties involved in making these comparisons due to inherent differences among the students themselves. They also acknowledged the relative impacts of independent variables such as education level obtained, years used in developing business beyond graduation, pre-programme education and experience and type of venture format chosen (e.g., independent or corporate).

According to Charney and Libecap (2000), approaches to entrepreneurship education have varied across colleges and universities from offering single courses in new business development or business plans pr stronger relationships with the business community. It is hoped that this would go a long way to unearthing challenges students encounter in the study of entrepreneurship as a course.eparation to integrated curricula that includes marketing, finance, competitive analysis, and business plan development. In some institutions, entrepreneurship as a major subject has been adopted as a specialized programme for undergraduates, MBA students, as well as students from engineering, medicine and other technical colleges.

In assessing the effects entrepreneurship education have on students in order to determine the degree to which it has accomplished its objectives and the resources committed to it, indicates that entrepreneurship education offered by the Ghanaian Polytechnics is not having positive spill-over effects on the students' propensity to be self-employed. It was realized by Charney and Libecap (2000) in their report represented to the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership that, there are positive spill-over effects from entrepreneurship education on other traditional business. There is clear evidence that entrepreneurship education increases the propensity of graduates to be self-employed. Once again, entrepreneurship graduates on average are *more* likely to be self-employed than are general business graduates.

Moreover, entrepreneurship students are less likely to be employed in government or by nonprofit organizations. Controlling for personal characteristics and other factors, entrepreneurship education increases the likelihood that a graduate alumnus owns his or her business by 11 percent relative to non-entrepreneurship graduates. They further contend that entrepreneurship education has a significant impact on the income of graduates. There is strong evidence that entrepreneurship education contributes to risk-taking and the formation of new ventures. On average, entrepreneurship graduates are *three times* more likely than non-entrepreneurship graduates to start new business ventures. Controlling for the personal characteristics of graduates and other environmental factors, entrepreneurship education increased the probability of an individual being instrumentally involved in a new business venture by 25 percent over non entrepreneurship.

On average entrepreneurship graduates have an average annual income that is 27 percent higher than the average annual income of non-entrepreneurship graduates, and entrepreneurship graduates are more likely to be employed full time. Further, they have 62 percent more assets than do their counterparts. Controlling for personal characteristics, entrepreneurship education increases the income of graduates by $12,561 beyond that of other business graduates.

4. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this paper is to access and evaluate the effect of Entrepreneurship innovation and competency education on Ghanaian Polytechnic students. In order to investigate this, the research was restricted

to only Takoradi Polytechnic Students. Methods used to carry out this research included interviews and questionnaires. A Semi –Structured questionnaires was used to gather information from students. It is important to note that only second and third year students were the target audience since they have had training in Entrepreneurship education.

The respondents were selected from the four schools of the Polytechnic namely; Applied Arts, Applied Sciences, Engineering, and Business and Management Studies. Six hundred and forty (640) questionnaires were distributed to students of Takoradi Polytechnic. The questionnaires were administered to the various departments of the schools. Statistic Product and Services Solution (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected. The results were presented using descriptive statistics.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

A. Demography of Respondents

Table 1, shows that 189 respondents which represent 29.5% were females, whiles 445 of the respondents representing 70.5% were males. It indicates that male students constitute the majority of the respondents. This is because most of the natures of the courses offered in the school are male biased, example Engineering.

Table 1: **Gender of Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	189	29.5%
Male	445	70.5%
Total	640	100%

Source: Field Survey 2014

Table 2 indicates that there are four (4) schools/faculties at Takoradi Polytechnic namely: School of Applied Arts, School of Applied Sciences, School of Business & Management Studies and the School of Engineering. From the table it shows that School of Business and Management Studies has the largest percentage of students - 54.8%

Table 2**: Faculties/Schools of Respondents**

School	Percentage (%)
Applied Arts	18%
Applied Sciences	9.2%
Business &Management Studies	54.8%
Engineering	18%
Total	100%

Source: Field Survey 2014

B. Students Attitude towards Entrepreneurship & Competency-based Education

With regard to students' attitude towards the study of entrepreneurship education. Table 3 summarizes the responses from the students. It shows that even though the course is abstract, too difficult and technical, it is not all that boring. Students also acknowledged the fact that the course can help them create businesses after school.

Table 3**: Students' Attitude towards Entrepreneurship & Competency-based Education**

Item	Yes (%)	No (%)
Lesson in Entrepreneurship is boring	17%	83%
Lesson in Entrepreneurship is abstract	18%	82%
Lesson in Entrepreneurship is difficult	15.6	84.4%
Lesson in Entrepreneurship is too technical	32.7%	67.3%
The course can equip students to set up business	94%	6%

Source: Field Survey 2014

C. Major Challenges Students Encounter

Table 4 sums up the major challenges students face in the study of entrepreneurship and competency-based education, notwithstanding the major challenges students face. It was discovered that 94% which represents the majority of students see the course to be important since they are less likely to be employed in government or by nonprofit organizations after graduation.

Table 4**: Major Challenges Students Encounter**

Item	Frequency	Percentages
What students learn is different from everyday practical work	106	34.5%
It is difficult understanding the lecturer/instructor	106	34.5%
Lesson learnt do not reflect reality in the business environment	78	25.4%
Uncomfortable lectures rooms	7	3.3%
Time allocated for the course is limited	10	2.3%

Source: Field Survey 2014

D. Ways of improving entrepreneurship and Competency-based Education

The following summarizes what students suggested on the ways of improving entrepreneurship course at Takoradi Polytechnic. From the table 5, it shows that 52% suggested more fieldwork, and 38% suggested provision of more loans to set up small businesses after school.

Table 5: **Ways of improving entrepreneurship and Competency-based Education**

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Fieldwork(Practical)	142	52.2%
More loans to students	38	38%
Increase credits hours for Students	24	8.8%
More books should be provided	42	15.4%
More lecturers	1	0.4%
Organize seminars to educate students on entrepreneurship education	42	15%

Source: Field Survey 2014

6. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The research was restricted to students with male students constituting the majority. Students were selected from the four schools of the Polytechnic. The study discovered that apart from the major challenges students face, majority (94%) of students see the course to be important since they are less likely to be employed in government or by nonprofit organizations after graduation. They therefore call for immediate review of the course to be made practicable, more time should be allocated to it and build the capacities of the lecturers involved and promote stronger ties with the job market. The role of government in empowering or motivating students to be self employed after was not left out. Most students' retreated that government should not only provide loans to prospective students to enable them set up small business but also to create enabling environment for small businesses to thrive.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the studies, the researchers can confidently draw the following conclusions:

- The course content and delivery should be thoroughly looked at often, to meet the challenges and realities in the job market.
- Most students are not happy about the way entrepreneurship education is being taught in Ghanaian Polytechnics. They contended that the course focuses more on theories than practical.
- Notwithstanding the numerous challenges the students face, most students acknowledged the fact that the course can equip prospective students with the much needed innovations and skills to set up small businesses as a way of a relieving the government from the provision of jobs to the throng of unemployed graduates filling our streets each day.
- Finally, more credit hours should be allotted to the teaching of entrepreneurship. Also more lectures with modern knowledge regarding the course in question should be employed to teach.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result, the researchers highly recommend that, the content of the course should be holistically reviewed to reflect the realities of the business environment.

Again, sufficient or more time should be allocated to entrepreneurship education in order to equip students with entrepreneurial skills.

Further, lessons in Entrepreneurship should be made practicable to empower students acquire basic skills to establish small businesses. In so doing, more seminars or practical work should be organized to educate students on the need to establish their own businesses.

For lecturers, it is important to organize regular seminars and workshops to build their capacities on the current trends in the entrepreneurship education.

Also, the course should be made to reflect the realities in the business environment. The government should also do well to create enabling environment for small businesses to thrive. Finally, the government should help students get access to soft loans to set up their businesses so that students can pay up later just like the students loan.

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